

# Historical Sketch of Poplar Tent Church

Cabarrus County      North Carolina



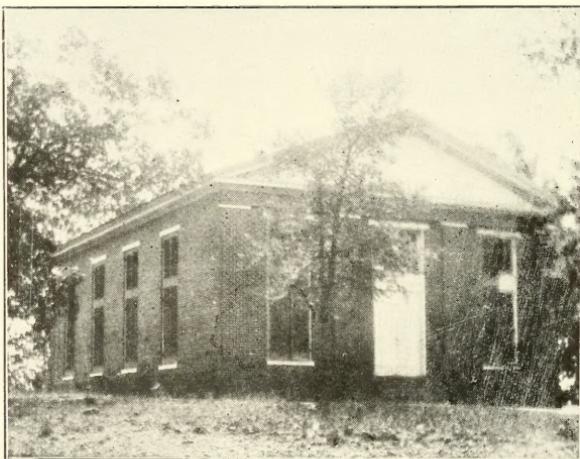
Reprinted Under the Auspices of  
The Cabarrus Black Boys Chapter  
Daughters of The American Revolution  
of Concord, N. C.



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2013 with funding from

Institute of Museum and Library Services, under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act, administered by the State Library of North Carolina. Grant issued to Duke University for the Religion in North Carolina project.





POPLAR TENT CHURCH

HISTORICAL SKETCH  
OF  
POPLAR TENT CHURCH  
  
By Wm. S. Harris  
Ruling Elder of Said Church  
  
WITH  
Introduction and Brief Resume of the  
HISTORY OF POPLAR TENT CHURCH  
From 1873 to 1923  
  
To which is appended an Article on  
REV. HEZEKIAH JAMES BALCH

AND  
The Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence  
By W. HAMPTON EUBANK, PASTOR

---

1924  
THE TIMES BOOK AND JOB PRESSES  
CONCORD, N. C.

queathed to us. There is great need today of lessons drawn from the noble past, from the unselfish lives of our pioneer fathers and mothers, to keep us from losing the finer qualities of soul and sinking down to the baser level of selfish materialism, when gold is more valued than nobility of character and pleasure more sought than opportunities for unselfish service—when making a living is considered of far more importance than making a life. Truly spake the poet when he said:

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,  
Where wealth accumulates and men decay.

The youth in the homes and the schools of North Carolina should have indelibly impressed upon their plastic minds the noble sacrifices and heroic deeds of our fathers and mothers in defense of civil and religious liberty. Let the illustrious names of the past be sung by poets, eulogized in pulpits, magnified by the press, taught in the schools, staged on the platform and heralded from the housetops until the self-seeking, pleasure loving, materialists break out in one mighty chorus—"My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing."

The names of those who held aloft the torch of human freedom and fought for the eternal principles of righteousness and justice should be held in everlasting remembrance. In this section of the state—"The Cradle of American Liberty"—Rev. Hezekiah James Balch, and others of the Mecklenburg Convention; the noble band of "Black Boys" and many others justly entitled to fame. And at Wilmington; Cornelius Harnett and his fifty men who made the first armed resistance ever made to the infamous "Stamp Act." And at Old Brunswick, the Governor's Summer Palace, near Wilmington, where patriots broke up Governor Tryon's barbecue party and threw whole oxen, which had been roasted for the occasion, together with barrels of beer, into the Cape Fear River. And at New Bern, "The Athens of North Carolina," where the patriots forced the Governor to release Herman Husbands by threatening to storm and burn his new and beautiful palace—let all these places become shrines of liberty and the names connected with them be engraved upon the hearts of a grateful people.

The writer of these lines not only inherited a love for the heroes of faith and liberty who wrought in the early

days of our country's struggle, but imbued much of his veneration for the past while a pupil at school in the historic halls of the building above referred to—the old Tryon Palace, at New Bern, the brick and other materials of which were brought from England. This palace, when completed, was said to be the most beautiful building of its day on the American Continent. It is now a tenement house and suggests but little of its former magnificence. Let religion and patriotism foster these places, and many others of like character, in the Old North State, where the faith and genius, the toil and blood of our noble forebears did much to purchase their "inalienable rights" to which we have fallen heir.

It is a reproach to any people to forget the debt of gratitude they owe to a God-fearing, patriotic, ancestry and to allow the tombs of such ancestors to crumble down and be forgotten. Soon after beginning his pastorate here, the writer sought, among the tombs of Poplar Tent's old graveyard, the monument of Rev. Hezekiah James Balch, (author of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence), which was soon discovered. And as he stood gazing at the weather-beaten marble slab—forgotten by many in this county and unknown to many others over the State, he could not repress a feeling of sadness—to think of a man who had risked his life, his all, for the liberty that we now enjoy, being so soon forgotten and his ashes neglected.

But here may we venture a prophecy: That ere many more decades pass the wealth and patriotism of North Carolina will awake and shake loose from the spirit of materialism which to some extent is threatening her, a spirit that in the past has strangled many of the nobler sentiments of mankind, and erect monuments in many of our cities and hamlets to perpetuate the memory of our heroic leaders of '75 and '76. And further, that the scholarship of North Carolina will vindicate Mr. Balch's right to fame by seeing that his name is inscribed on the very apex of such monuments. "And be it further resolved" that the City of Concord, set the example by observing "Balch Memorial Day" and by erecting in some public square in the city a suitable Balch Monument. Will not some public spirited citizen of the City dedicate some of his surplus cash to a cause so worthy of religion and patriotism?—"So mote it be."

In walking through the old graveyard back of the church we find many names beside Mr. Balch's which are

entitled to our remembrance. Their tomb-stones are slowly crumbling to dust. And soon the resting place of their remains will be forgotten, unless arrested and restored by the hand of love, inspired by devotion to religion and country. It is hoped therefore, that some sort of society prompted by motives of religion and patriotism may be organized to maintain, at least, some of these old tombs, and that such a society might be given financial assistance by those who have sufficient means at their disposal. The public spirited, patriotic, Christian citizens of large means in our country have it in their power to render a great service to our people by placing sufficient funds in the hands of responsible parties, for instance the local Chapter of the D. A. R., for the erection of creditable memorials and monuments, thus teaching religion and patriotism, not only to this generation, but to millions yet unborn.

A nation's life, security and peace are dependent upon the teaching of a patriotism controlled by religion. A man's religion determines the character of his citizenship, and his patriotism determines the character of his loyalty. Neglect these forces in a nation's life and soon the state will perish from the earth, through corruption, anarchy, and revolution. No nation, relying upon force for its existence, has "long endured." And especially is this true of democracies.

The writer recently visited the Phifer graveyard, which is about a mile from the home of Mr. R. V. Caldwell, and near the Inn, on the old Salisbury Road. This historic road was the scene of many thrilling events in the days of the Revolutionary War. The armies of Royalists and Patriots traveled it and contended with each other in the great struggle which, in the end, proved that liberty, like truth, crushed to earth, will rise again.

Over this road traveled General Washington, when in 1790 he visited Colonel Phifer, whose home was near the Inn and in sight of the graveyard. The stagecoach of the early days traveled this road from Salisbury to Charlotte, stopping over night at the above mentioned Inn. Here, behind these days, now showing the effect of age, many weary travelers alighting from the coach, found rest and refreshment for the continuance of their journey on the morrow.

The old graveyard mentioned is sadly neglected. It has so grown up with large trees, brush and briars, that one has difficulty in finding the tombstones which mark the

resting place of the remains of many who risked their property, their lives, and their all, that "liberty might not perish from the earth." Among these we noted the tombstones of the following: Col. Martin Phifer, born October 18, 1720, died January 18, 1791. His wife, Margaret, born October 29, 1722, died January 18, 1803. And their three distinguished sons—John, "Patriot," statesman, and signer of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, born 1746, died 1777; Col. Caleb, born 1748, died July 3, 1811; Col. Martin, Jr., born March 25, 1756, died November 12, 1837. Col. George Alexander, elder in Poplar Tent Church; David Reece, signer of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence; Robert Harris, signer of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence; Col. Thos. McClure, James Cannon, Sr., James Cannon, Jr.

These, and the many others whose sacrifices helped to purchase the precious heritage of liberty that we now enjoy, should not be forgotten. A grateful posterity, with respect for their memory, should at least keep the graves properly marked and the graveyard clean, lest their deeds be "from the minds of the living erased." One generation goes and another comes. The former leaves to the latter its contribution to human welfare. The latter receives this contribution without realizing its debt of gratitude and therefore soon forgets the benefaction and allows the benefactor to pass into oblivion. Oh how soon our "labors of love" are forgotten by all save Him who rewards even the giving of a cup of water in the name of a disciple!

In closing the introductory part of this sketch, may I quote a few lines from "A Defense of the Revolutionary History of the State of North Carolina," by Jo. Seawell Jones, Esq., written 59 years after the signing of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence? Mr. Jones says: "Of those who stood forth for their country in the darkest hours of the war, and who fought with a courage worthy of the glory of their cause \* \* statesmen and festival orators, alike with the school-boy declaimer, are mute as to their valor, virtue or fame \* \* I do bewail this indifference to the superior claims of our own sires; for it is by appealing to their sacrifices and hardships that public spirit is best kept alive, and a laudable pride to elevate the character of our government is best sustained. Extinguish this feeling of veneration for the character of our ancestors, and you vitally assail the honor of the State, corrupt and degrade the people."

North Carolina is rich in history, much of which is unwritten. It is to be earnestly desired, therefore, that her future historians, before preparing their histories, may seek for their material more diligently in, and confine themselves more closely to, their own State. In many North Carolina Histories there is more of Virginia or Massachusetts than of North Carolina. Also our school commencementes have programmes which oftentimes teach more history of other States than they do of our own. We do not wish to teach a narrow, selfish, provincial patriotism. But we do wish North Carolina History taught to our children. Bismarck said: "That which you wish put in a nation's life, first put it in the school." Let us put into our schools veneration for our illustrious dead. And in order that the world may know more about the great spirits of our past let us use more freely the pen, which is "mightier than the sword."

In reading Mr. Harris' sketch of Poplar Tent Church, it will be observed that he closed his history in the year 1873. The writer therefore will add, at the conclusion of Mr. Harris' Sketch, a brief resume of the last fifty years of Poplar Tent's History, bringing it down to the present date—1923.

In the back of this Pamphlet there will also be added an article entitled, "Poplar Tent Church and Cemetery and Tomb of Rev. Hezekiah James Balch, author of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence." This article, with illustrations, was published in "The Presbyterian of the South," April 25, 1923, at Richmond, Va.

W. HAMPTON EUBANK.

## Historical Sketch of Poplar Tent Church.

---

In obedience to the appointment of Concord Presbytery, at the Spring Session held in Salisbury, N. C., April, 1871, I enter with reluctance and apprehension upon the task of writing a sketch of the history of Poplar Tent and her people. I am reluctant because I wish the kindly office of snatching from the twilight of tradition the materials of her noble history, her noble men, and matchless women, had been confided to other and abler hands.

I am not without apprehension that though I hasten to obey the legitimate and recognized authority which commands the service, I shall fail to exhibit properly that "history, which is philosophy teaching by example," and fall below your just expectations.

The location of the territory of Poplar Tent, now Cabarrus county, but originally part of Mecklenburg, and the thrilling events which connected her illustrious names with the achievement of civil and religious liberty, make her soil classic ground. The memory of virtue, tried in a furnace, if not heated like that in the miracle of ancient story, seven times hotter than was wont, yet was subjected to the severest tests which could be applied to human endurance in a time that tried men's souls. The principles of individual accountability, in the church—the pure stamp of human character as the prelude to a higher and better condition of being, were drawn from the Bible as the sublime charter of immortal faith. And the boon of regulated freedom, under a government itself ruled by defined and written law, is corollary, and will not be less true to the end of time, to rally nations against oppression than it has been conspicuous in every great battle of the enlightened portions of our race, from Marathon to Mecklenburg.

In the absence of records, it is the province of history to gather and preserve authentic tradition and incident, and, by that means, place conspicuously before the present and coming generations of Presbyterians, the mellow

light of ancestral example, the habitudes and thoughts and actions of the early settlers, in the exigent periods of their location, amid the primal forest. One of the sublimest lessons which the church in her amazing history teaches, is that display of moral energy, which sent her people and her accredited ambassadors to proclaim the everlasting gospel in the wilderness, when the echo of the Indian war-whoop had not yet died away; to establish upon strong foundations the pillars of Christian civilization; and to plant temples of worship for the Most High with golden candlesticks, which should reflect the great doctrines of grace, and truth, and virtue not less brilliantly than those of Corinth and Thessalonica. It is fitting that the memory of men by whom the banner of Christian civilization was upborne amid so many and so great trials, should be preserved and honored. "For the fashion of this world passeth away, even as we use its highest gifts—they perish beneath our trembling hands. Its noblest monuments turn to dust, as with unsteady feet we traverse their august courts. And its most awful names cut into its most costly marbles, live dimly in characters distorted or well nigh effaced, and become but the faint memorials of what they were vainly intended to commemorate."

The first settlement was made in Poplar Tent in 1732, on the plantation east of the church, afterwards owned by Jediah Wallace, and now occupied by Mrs. Caldwell. From 1732 to 1751, the present bounds of Poplar Tent were sparsely settled by Scotch-Irish immigrants from Pennsylvania and Cecil county, Maryland.

The first settlers were Clark, for whom Clark's Creek was called, Aaron Alexander, Daniel Alexander, David Reese, Charles Harris, William Black, James Campbell, Adam Meek, Zaccheus Wilson.

The Rev. John Thompson, a minister licensed and ordained by the Presbytery of Donegal, was sent by the Presbytery of Philadelphia to preach to scattered Presbyterians in the colony of North Carolina. Mr. Thompson became the pastor of Center Church, now Iredell county, and from this central point he visited among the families throughout the country between the Yadkin and Catawba Rivers, wheresoever there was any Presbyterian element.

In this labor of love he gathered the material and laid the foundation upon which several churches were afterwards built. At Charlotte he preached in the grove at the Presbyterian blacksmith-shop. It must be borne in mind

that, amid the sparse settlements of that time, the blacksmith-shop was an essential and attractive institution. Mr. Thompson preached, also, to the people of Poplar Tent under the shade of a large poplar tree which stood near the place, now occupied by the session house and academy.

He was not at any time the pastor, but organized a church, ordained a bench of elders, whose names were David Reese, William Black and Charles Harris. Tradition, also mentions, in connection with the early eldership, Clark and Daniel Alexander. The Clark family and name have both become extinct—not a tract is left except the mound of the log-cabin chimney on the east margin of Clark's Creek, near the bridge, now Barringer's. Clark was a Scotch-Irish immigrant from Pennsylvania—a man of uncommon energy, overmastering common sense, blameless life and endowed with undaunted courage. Soon after his settlement here—having brought with him a young and beautiful wife—the Cherokee Indians made an incursion into the neighborhood, prowled around the log-cabin, killed and scalped her, and made their escape before Clark could reach home from an adjacent field, in which he was at work.

Black and Harris, who were the nearest neighbors of the Clarks, were both absent from home when this frightful and melancholy event occurred. Owing to the fact that there were no saw-mills as yet erected in the country, there could be no lumber procured wherewith to make a suitable coffin. Hence, the body of Clark's wife was wrapped in a blanket, removed in a sled about two miles to a bluff on Rocky River, now George C. McClure's, and buried by an Irish bondman and an African slave. Thus the nucleus of the oldest graveyard in Cabarrus was inaugurated; it lies about two miles southwest of Poplar Tent church, and contains the ashes of all the early Presbyterians of this section.

The incidents of this story of trial and misfortune to an early settler, in that he buried his young and beautiful wife without a coffin in the unbroken earth of his adopted country, well illustrates the privations and dangers, which this brave band of pioneers had to incur in lengthening the cords, and strengthening the stakes of Christian civilization.

The organization of the church in 1751 was so far advanced that Mr. Thompson preached several times during the summer, baptized children, etc. He preached frequently during the summers of 1752 and 1753 under the

poplar tree. He died in September, 1753 and was buried at Barker's graveyard, now Iredell county, near the road leading from Mt. Mourne to Beattie's Ford. The poplar tree under which Thompson exerted his persuasive eloquence in the ministration of his benign mission, and which clustered around it all the thrilling associations of the early history of Poplar Tent, fell in 1802, just fifty years after its grateful shade had been consecrated to so noble a purpose, and has long since wasted away. From the time of the death of the revered Thompson in 1753, there is no tradition or evidence of there having been any preacher of the word to this people, except during the temporary visit of Spenser and McWhorter, mentioned in Foote's Sketches, as having occurred in 1764, until the accession of the Rev. Hezekiah J. Balch to the pastorate in 1769. Prior to this latter event, the number of settlers had been augmented by the addition of the Pattersons, the Pattons, and the family of the late Archibald Houston. At the period when the Rev. H. J. Balch became the pastor, other immigrants in large numbers from Pennsylvania and Maryland were drawn to this region by the wonderful story of the fertility of its soil and the salubrity of its climate. And when they came, they found it not surpassed even by the far-famed valley of Aosta—and if not flowing with milk and honey, as erst it was in the prophet land, yet with the provident care and the spirit of rational acquisition which has ever been the distinguishing mark of enlightened Presbyterianism, they planted their homes in confidence and hope, that they would secure competence and independence for themselves, and for their children peace, freedom and abundance. With characteristic energy and industry, the wilderness was soon made to blossom as the rose, and their children rejoiced in a fair, broad, abounding land.

In 1769 several families accompanied Mr. Balch in his removal from Pennsylvania, among whom was that of Mr. Wallace, the father of the late Jediah Wallace, and grandfather of the Rev. James A. Wallace, of the Synod of Alabama, and Rev. M. J. Wallace, of the Synod of Arkansas, both of whom are now able and successful ministers of the Presbyterian Church.

In pursuing the rapid current of historic events the digression will be readily pardoned, while I stop to pay a merited but brief tribute to the memory of Jediah Wallace who, for a long time conducted the church music in Poplar Tent. Without any equal in the natural endow-

ment which fitted him for this position, he was the impersonation of all the essentials of Christian virtue. Endowed with strong sense, placid in his temper, bland in his manners, incorruptibly honest, he was a gallant and true soldier when the stern exigencies of war called him to arms in the Revolutionary struggle. He was a life-long and efficient elder of this church, and died in 1830. Having long led his people in singing the sweet songs of Zion on earth, his office was a fitting type of his employment in the "land of the leal," where he, doubtless, strikes anew the song of Redemption on the lyre of the angels. The memory of the just is blessed.

About the year 1770, there came other and important accessions to the population of Poplar Tent: The Crawfords, the Carrigans, McCalebs, McRaes, Fraziers, Kiloughs, Reids, Smiths, Bakers. John Phifer settled on Buffalo, known as the Red Hill, afterwards the Long place. Though in the early settlement of the country he had lived at other places in this country prior to that time. He was an eminent statesman, and a signer of the Declaration of Independence at Charlotte, 20th of May, 1775. It was on his plantation, and near to his residence, where the gallant band of Black Boys, headed by Captain Black Bill Alexander, of Sugar Creek, aided by his patriotic confreres, the Whites and others from the neighboring congregation of Rocky River, effected their memorable achievement in 1771 by destroying the King's powder, which was being transported in wagons from Charleston to answer the behest of a tyrant colonial Governor.

Mr. Phifer lies buried at the Red Hill graveyard. He was the father of General Paul Phifer, grand-father of Gen. John N. Phifer, of Mississippi, and great-grandfather of Gen. Charles H. Phifer, a distinguished Confederate officer in the battle of Shiloh in the late war of the States. The Caldwells came from Delaware, one of whom settled on the place now owned by Jonathan A. Davis, on the west side of the river, but soon afterwards removed to and occupied the land now owned by Thomas H. Robinson. The accession of the Caldwells to Poplar Tent occurred in 1780. The head of this family, though an emigrant from Delaware, was originally from Ireland. He was the father of the late Charles Caldwell, a distinguished physician and author in Philadelphia—afterwards head of the Transylvania University and Professor in the Louisville Medical College, Kentucky. It is fitting to say in reference to this

eminent man, to elucidate the moral cause and effect of systems of education and religion upon the human mind, that though he was brought up strictly in the Presbyterian faith, yet, for a time, he left the teachings of his ancestors, in his ardent pursuit of material Philosophy, and wandered after strange gods, until much learning made him mad. Though his fame and achievements heralded his name over both hemispheres, and made him a high priest at the altar of science, in becoming the champion of Phrenology, he espoused the doctrines of insidious infidelity under the guise of material philosophy, and thus involved in mateo-techny, to upbear and sustain his theory, put strange fire in the censers. But the germ of truth implanted in his youthful mind, under Presbyterian auspices, impelled him onward to large acquisitions of knowledge, and thus vindicates the axiom, that the advancement of our race must depend upon incipient moral causes. Dr. Caldwell died in 1853, at an advanced age, and lies buried at Louisville, Ky. Suffice it to say, that whatever errors of opinion or of action may have characterized him as a votary of science, in his mature age he returned to the worship of the living and true God, and died in the faith of his fathers.

Benjamin Patton, one of the early settlers of Poplar Tent, was also a signer of the memorable Declaration of Independence at Charlotte, and died a member of this church. He was a man of learning and piety. Subsequent to this time came the Gilmers, the Allisons, the Hopes, the Bradfords, the Dewees, the Rosses, the Stevensons, the Pickens, the Martins, the Youngs, the Rogers, the Mitchells, the Baines, the Gardners, the Giles, the Cheeves, the Means, the Weddingtons, the Newmans, the Shields. The Cannons came to Poplar Tent through intermarriage with Anna, the daughter of William Black, one of the heroic pioneer band. The Johnstons, also, came into the congregation at a still later period, through intermarriage with Mary, daughter of David Crawford, one of the early pillars of the church. William Shields was a member of this church—he was the gallant and generous soldier of Sumter, who discovered, when alone in the routed camp of the enemy, a bag of gold. Not less generous than brave, steady on the march and true on the field, he carried, voluntarily, his pile of gold to the marquee of his General, requested, if Sumter concurred with him that it was British gold, that he should take charge of it, and use it to buy clothing

and shoes for his ragged and suffering fellow-soldiers. It is needless to say that this brave officer used the gold faithfully and well for the noble purpose to which it was consecrated by the honest and generous soldier.

After the installation of Mr. Balch, Harris and David Reese died at their respective homes. Wm. Black, also of the first bench of elders, died near Richmond, Va., on his return from Pennsylvania, whither he had gone on business. Yet all of these elders lived long enough to take an active part with their pastor in the then opening drama of the coming revolution.

Mr. Balch served as pastor from 1769 to the period of his death, which untimely event occurred in 1776. When this great sorrow came, the little band of settlers felt that "their strong staff was broken and the beautiful rod." The second bench of elders consisted of Nathaniel Alexander and Abram Alexander. To these were added by the choice of the congregation, in the year 1771, James Barr, Robert Harris, James Alexander, George Alexander and James Reese. Mr. Balch was a man of ripe learning and pressed forward with unwavering devotion to the cause of his Divine Master. Abundant in every good work and word, he took an active part in moulding and preparing the popular mind for the great struggle of the revolution. He looked to the achievement of principles, upon which a government of regulated liberty and law could be established, and which should be removed from its strong foundations no more forever. Hence he was a prominent actor in the convention which declared independence of the crown of Great Britain, at Charlotte, May 20, 1775. He died the following year in the prime of life and in the midst of his usefulness. It is a remarkable co-incidence that all of the original bench of elders were removed about the same time with their pastor, and, doubtless, were gathered with him to the fold of the Great Shepherd.

In the year 1847, a number of citizens met at Poplar Tent on the occasion of a railroad meeting, consisting of the late Judge Osborne, Dr. Charles W. Harris, now no more, and several others yet living, when attention was drawn to the fact that there was no monument to mark the grave of Balch; whereupon the fund was immediately raised to build a suitable monument at the spot where tradition located his grave, in the centre of the first burial ground. This centre was ascertained through the knowledge of Abijah Alexan-

der, then more than 90 years of age, and by whom in part one line or wall of the original enclosure had been built.

The Rev. James A. Wallace, a native of Poplar Tent, then a minister of the Presbyterian Church in the Synod of South Carolina, was informed of the praiseworthy effort to rescue the name and grave of this illustrious man from oblivion, and was appealed to, to write a suitable epitaph. He did so cheerfully, and furnished the beautiful record which is carved on the marble that now covers his mortal remains. From the period of the death of Mr. Balch, there seems to have been an interregnum from 1776 to the accession to the pastorate of the Rev. Robert Archibald in 1778. But it is probable that there were no regular ministrations in this intermediate period; it was filled up by the ever-varying vicissitudes of a doubtful and terrible revolution. Mr. Archibald performed the duties of the pastorate from 1778 to 1792, and during a considerable part of that time was preceptor of the academy. In 1781 and '85, Samuel Harris, a member of Poplar Tent church, taught the classics and other branches in the academy, and left Mr. Archibald his whole time to devote to his pastoral duties.

In 1793, Rev. Alexander Caldwell became the pastor, and continued to exercise the functions of his great office for about four years. He was a man of finished education, accomplished manners and unsullied Christian virtue. He married Sarah Davidson, of Hopewell, by whom he had three children—all of whom, though advanced in years, are still living, and have each illustrated faithfully and well all the offices of a useful and well-spent life. This is characteristic of the lineage of their noble and revered ancestor—the Rev. David Caldwell, D. D., of Guilford county. It is one of the amazing, but inscrutable dispensations in the providence of an All-wise and All-governing God, that such an imperial mind should be eclipsed, and reason totter from its throne, never again to resume its sway.

“Nor Gabriel asks the reason why,  
Nor God the reason gives.”

Mr. Caldwell ceased from the pastorate of Poplar Tent in 1797, was returned in hopeless insanity to the paternal mansion in Guilford, where he died in 1841.

In the vacancy of the pulpit of Poplar Tent, which occurred in 1797, there was no supply of the means of grace, other than that afforded at stated periods by the Rev. Samuel E. McCorkle, D. D., of Thyatira, Rowan county, N. C.

*B. C. M.*

The congregation and bench of elders consisting of Robert Allison, Robert Hope, Robert Harris, and George Alexander, call'd to the pastorate in 1801 the Rev. John Robinson, "Clarum et tenerabile nomen." Mr. Robinson, though born near Sugar Creek Church, had received his academic education at Poplar Tent under the tutelage of Mr. Archibald—completed his education at Winnsboro, S. C.; was licensed to preach in 1793, and sent by Orange Presbytery on a mission to the eastern part of the State. About this time Mr. Robinson married Mary Baldwin, a lady of accomplished mind and manners. This event crowned his domestic life with unusual happiness. The bland and lovely virtues which clustered in her character, doubtless, did much to temper the ardent and lofty genius of her husband to the great work before him. Though he had a numerous family, only four reached mature age, two sons and two daughters. One son and two daughters are still living, by whom the mantle of Christian truth and virtue is worthily borne. The eldest son, Samuel B. Robinson, an accomplished and highly educated young man, early left the paternal mansion. Though he was moral in his habits and correct in his manners, he was ardent in his temper and had a passion for danger and wild adventure. In his voluntary exile from his home and friends he participated in the wars of the South American Republics until their independence was wrested from the Spanish and Portuguese crowns. Then as a soldier of fortune he joined the struggling Greeks, and vainly attempted to re-establish that lost Republic upon the foundations of its former greatness and renown, but, like Byron, he found,

" 'Twas Greece, but 'twas living Greece no more."

It is within the memory of many of the living friends of Dr. Robinson, how a father's heart was touched with unspeakable tenderness as he followed the fortunes of his gallant and noble, but adventurous son. After the return of peace to those distant fields of danger and commotion, young Robinson, still stainless from any vice, followed a sea-faring life in which he attained just and honorable distinction as one of the most gallant commanders of the ocean. The splendid merchant ship of which he was the loved and trusted Captain, sailed from New York on a voyage to the West Indies, but went down in February, 1843, with all on board. Nothing is known except that the vessel was lost.

Without making this episode of inseparable domestic

history too prolix, and to resume the narrative of consecutive ecclesiastic events, Mr. Robinson after having labored in the eastern part of the State about eight years, the last year of which term he was the pastor of the church at Fayetteville, and teacher of a classical school, accepted the pastorate of Poplar Tent, and was installed in the same year, 1801. Mr. Robinson continued to be the pastor of Poplar Tent from this latter period until the early part of 1806, during which time he also taught a classical school. In this latter year Mr. Robinson resigned the pastorate of Poplar Tent, removed to Fayetteville, became again the pastor of that Church, and resumed the preceptorship of the school. Mr. Robinson returned to the pastorate of Poplar Tent in 1809, and reopened in connection with his pastoral labors a classical school. In the intermediate period from 1806-09, there does not appear to have been any settled pastor. There is manifestly an error in Dr. Foote's Sketches in placing the return of Mr. Robinson to Poplar Tent in 1818. The interregnum of the pastorate continued only three years.

In 1802, there were in this church some manifestations of religious excitement which took the form of remarkable gyrations, and were often attended with syncope; but the venerable bench of elders, consisting of Robt. Allison, Robt. Hope, Robert Harris, Geo. Alexander and Jediah Wallace, discountenanced this tendency, and set their faces as a flint against such sudden and tumultuous conversions. Though Mr. Robinson to some extent differed in opinion from them on this subject, yet he afterwards most fully concurred with them. Soon after these events, the most of this venerable bench of elders passed to accountabilities where faith only can follow them. Robert Hope died in 1808; Robert Harris in 1804; George Alexander in 1814; Robert Allison in 1804.

Abram Alexander, Wm. Carrigan, Benjamin Alexander, Thos. Hope, James Cannon, were elected elders about this time—all of whom have passed away. John Stephenson was elected an elder in 1820, but removed to Missouri not long afterwards. Joseph Young was elected to the eldership in 1823; died in 1835. Levi Hope in 1833; removed to Mississippi in 1838. Owing to age and infirmity Dr. Robinson resigned the pastorate in 1841, and was succeeded by the Rev. J. M. M. Caldwell as stated supply in the years 1841 and 1842. Dr. Robinson died in December 1843, having been the pastor of Poplar Tent thirty-six years. Though

not exactly in the chronological order of events, it is fitting to mention that the University of North Carolina conferred upon Mr. Robinson the title of Doctor of Divinity in 1829, as a just tribute to his distinguished usefulness, learning and eloquence. Dr. Robinson was an extraordinary man—superbly endowed by nature, brilliant in conversation, of unsurpassed genius and eloquence, heroic in Christian virtue, whensoever the exigencies of error or vice demanded the fearless tones of his manly courage. Whilst he ever bowed meekly to his God, yet in the performance of his duty, he regarded not the face of mortal man. It was a characteristic expression with him and still remembered by many who often heard him use it on occasions which called forth the fervid devotion of his impressioned nature in the maintenance of great principles of truth and right: "I know that I am immortal 'till my work is done."

It is not surprising that the testimony of the church, which he served so faithfully and so well, should be stamped upon the day and generation in which he lived. He was in all respects one of the highest styles of men in mind and manners, but most resplendent in the crowning glory of his character, was the moral splendor of his life. Now that more than a quarter of a century has elapsed since the voice of the "old man eloquent" ceased to herald the glad tidings of the gospel, the fragrance of his virtues still clusters round the churches and homes of his loved land, balmy and attractive as the breezes that "blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle." Peerless in the glory of consecrated genius, he stood like Masillon, the Legate of the skies. This mellow light of his beautiful life still gleams upon the pathway of the Christian pilgrim as erst did his example and the scenes of his earthly actions,

"Lure to brighter worlds and lead the way."

In his personal appearance he was tall and commanding—his bearing was ever marked with peculiar frankness and the utmost singleness of purpose. Though the zeal even of ennobling pursuit may sometimes have hurried him beyond the mark of prudence, yet he was dignified in his temper, and always magnanimous in his spirit and graceful in his manners beyond that of any other man, contemporary with him, in the realms of human accomplishment. It is fitting here to remark that in one of the tours of missionary labor assigned him in the mountain country by Presbytery, that then being in the decline of life he had occas-

ion to stop and rest a few days at the Warm Springs, Buncombe county. While stopping there he made the acquaintance of Dr. Samuel Henry Dickson, the then distinguished head of the Charleston Medical College—a gentleman known to fame by his achievements of science, and a master of all the grace and etiquette that adorns the most polished society of the world. After his acquaintance and companionship with Dr. Robinson for several days, Dr. Dickson was heard to say, that it was strange but true, that if he were sent on a mission to find the most accomplished gentleman in his manners that he had ever known, he would have to travel to the backwoods of North Carolina to search for Dr. Robinson.

Dr. Robinson taught school many years at Poplar Tent and Fayetteville. Among the pupils who became ministers of the gospel were the Revs. Henry Reid, John W. Reid and Joseph Y. Alexander, of the Synod of Georgia; the Rev. Anthony W. Ross, of the Synod of South Carolina; the Rev. Robert G. Weddington, a prominent minister of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Tennessee; all natives of Poplar Tent, and received their tutelage at the hands of Dr. Robinson, all of whom illustrated lives of distinguished usefulness in their adopted homes.

The Rev. Cyrus Johnson, D. D., received his theological education under Dr. Robinson. The distinguished ability and devotion of Dr. Johnston is yet fresh in the memory of all the churches of this region. He is claimed as a son of Poplar Tent, and pupil of her illustrious teacher. Dr. Johnston was the pastor of the church at Charlotte, and died in 1854; like the prophet leader of Israel with his eye not dim, nor his natural force abated. Having just passed the noon of life he fell with his armor on, and while yet the torch of his massive, but severely trained intellect, was in the full blaze of its consecrated power.

The Rev. William B. Marony, of Fayetteville Presbytery, and the Rev. Hartwell Spain—both of whom are now no more—were educated in part by Dr. Robinson. Mr. Spain was a distinguished minister of the Methodist Church in South Carolina. Governor Owen of this State, Governor Israel Pickens, Gov. John Murphy, of Alabama, Hon. Chas. Fisher, Daniel M. Forney, Henry W. Conner, Daniel M. Barringer, representatives in Congress, the latter of whom was also minister of the United States Government at the Court of Spain.

James Graham, John F. Brevard, Lawson H. Alexander,

Wm. J. Alexander, Richard H. Alexander, Daniel Coleman, James E. Kerr, of this State, General John N. Phifer, of Mississippi, Geo. W. Harris of Tennessee, Lieut. Governor Franklin Cannon, of Missouri, Judge Shelby Corosine, of Indiana, were pupils of Dr. Robinson, and all of whom have filled the high places of power as useful and successful statesmen. There was a large number of young men educated by this illustrious preceptor, who adorned the medical profession and stamped their usefulness on every walk of life. Among those who became distinguished in the healing art and as accomplished citizens in their respective spheres of action, were Drs. Joel B. Houston, S. S. Harris, Jos. W. Ross, I. D. Cash, James F. Gilmore, Joseph Young, of this State; Dr. John Sharp Reid, of South Carolina; Drs. Wm. Russell, Wilson McRae and Caleb P. Shive, of Georgia; Dr. Franklin Cannon and Wm. B. Cannon, of Missouri; Dr. Robert G. Weddington, of Tennessee; Dr. Wm. Gardner, of Mississippi; and Dr. A. C. Houston, of Alabama.

It is believed that Dr. Robinson did almost as much in his school to equip mind and mould moral elements for the good of the world, as he effected by his great commission in the pulpit. In testimony of their grateful appreciation of their venerable teacher, his pupils who survived him built a handsome monument—a marble slab, on which there is a beautiful inscription appropriate to his devoted and well-spent life.

END The next pastor of Poplar Tent was the Rev. Walter W. Pharr. Mr. Pharr was called to the pastorate in 1843. At the time of his installation the bench of elders consisted of John Johnston, Wm. S. Allison, Robt. Caldwell, Dr. Chas. W. Harris, David Johnson, Ibzan Cannon, and Thos. H. Robinson. John Johnston died in 1845; William S. Allison in 1850; Robert Caldwell in 1853; David Johnston in 1845; Thomas H. Robinson removed to Mississippi in 1847. Thus during the pastorate of Mr. Pharr his elders became thinned and mutilated in number.

Though Mr. Pharr was young at the time of his accession to the pastorate, no man ever ministered to his flock with more fidelity or more strictly in accordance to the will of the Great Shepherd. His pastorate was marked for its usefulness and acceptance to the people. Those who still survive remember him with fond affection. During the pastorate of Mr. Pharr the third house of public worship was built. With the pastor's well-tempered zeal,

he induced the congregation to tear down the old frame house, which had a very antiquated appearance from having been painted red, and build the plain, but tasteful and substantial brick edifice which now occupies the site of the two old church buildings of the early times.

Charles W. Harris received his dismission as an elder of this church but died soon afterwards. It is a touching and melancholy reminiscence of Mr. Pharr's pastorate that all the venerable and trusted elders at the time of his accession were separated from him by death or removal, except in the case of Major Ibazan Cannon, who died about three months (in December, 1857), after Mr. Pharr's removal from the congregation.

Robert S. Young and Thomas McClelland were elected to the eldership in 1847; Wm. S. Harris in 1849. Mr. McClelland served but a short time, when he obtained his dismission and removed out of the congregation. In 1855, M. W. Johnson, D. S. Caldwell, Theo. Cannon, E. R. Harris and Chas. M. McKinley were elected elders. Mr. Pharr resigned his charge in July, 1857, and removed to Statesville, leaving the congregation in a prosperous condition with 163 white members and 104 black members.

The Rev. D. A. Penick, Jr., was called to the pastorate in the latter part of the year 1857, and installed in February, 1858. Charles M. McKinley, after having filled usefully and acceptably the office of Ruling Elder for a short time, died in 1859, and was buried at Rocky River Church, in the neighborhood of which place he was born and brought up during the pastorate of Mr. Penick, which has been one of great fidelity and unremitting labor, having been subjected part of the time to all the terrible vicissitudes of a wasting and ruinous war. Suffice it to say, that his people believe that he has been faithful and true, alike in their season of prosperity prior to the war, and amid the deep shades of their poverty and bereavement since its disastrous close. During Mr. Penick's pastorate Robert S. Young continued as a useful and most acceptable elder, until he laid his life as a gallant and true soldier upon the altar of home, liberty and country. He was an officer in the Confederate army, killed in action near Petersburg, Va., in 1864, and lies buried in the graveyard of Poplar Tent. The countrymen of Major Robert Simmonton Young believe that no nobler offering was ever made on the altar of public virtue and truth. May the restoration of a government of regulated liberty and law be commensurate

with the value of the sacrifice. He was resisting the aggression of public enemies in obedience to the authorities of his State, though, doubtless,

"Lightly they'll talk of the spirit that is gone,  
And o'er his cold ashes upbraid him—  
But little he'll reck if they let him sleep on,  
In the grave where (Southrons) have laid him."

In 1858 James Cannon was elected to the bench of elders but removed out of the bounds soon afterwards. This gentleman was also a gallant officer in the army of Northern Virginia, fell severely wounded in the battle of Fredericksburg, Va., from which he finally recovered and removed to Mississippi. In 1867 the African membership wholly withdrew from this church, notwithstanding that persons of color had always received the most enlightened Christian instruction from all our pastors, and were provided with the most liberal facilities for hearing the gospel preached. Under all the circumstances the pastor and session thought it expedient to grant dismission in every case, and thus unargued did obey the stern logic of events.

In 1864 Thomas H. Robinson returned and was re-elected to the bench of elders. During Mr. Penick's pastorate Mr. Edwin R. Harris, an efficient elder for fourteen years, died on the 27th of March, 1869.

The deacons at present consist of John C. Ross, C. J. Harris, D. G. Holbrooks, J. H. Morrison, Robt. Johnston, A. Reidling and C. A. Barringer. Although the office of deacon was unknown in the history of this church until 1840, the bench of deacons has contributed much to the prosperity of the church and the proper administration of its secular affairs.

In the brief review of the history of Poplar Tent, it is fitting to inquire how much she has contributed in one hundred and forty years to the stupendous march of human advance. What minds did she send forth—with burnished armor—to wield their trenchant blades against the enemies of social order and Christian truth? Has she lessened the great Sahara of human ignorance and debasement? And to what end has she sent out her educated minds, imbued with Christian truth and virtue, to blaze like camp-fires, striking their broad glare against the darkness of the night? Let the sequel answer:

Hezekiah J. Balch, Benjamin Patton, Robert Harris, Zacheus Wilson, John Phifer and David Reese, ministers,

elders and members of the church, were signers of the Declaration of Independence at Charlotte, May 20th, 1775. Wm. Churchill Houston of New Jersey, was native here to the manor born—educated in part of the log-cabin academy at Poplar Tent. He graduated at Princeton in 1768—was elected professor of mathematics and natural philosophy in that renowned institution in 1771, resigned in 1783. He devoted himself to the profession of law and illustrated a splendid career as a lawyer and statesman in his adopted State. He was a delegate from New Jersey to the Convention, which formed the Federal Constitution in 1787, but declined to append his name to that instrument on account of its concession of powers to the Federal Government, which he thought in the exigencies of the future might be abused, to the detriment of States and the people. Mr. Houston married the daughter of Jonathan Dickinson, the first president of Princeton College, and some of his descendants who still live in New Jersey are distinguished for their probity and usefulness. He died in 1788 while yet in the vigor of his days,

“Amid life’s unfinished plan, when but half his  
work was done.”

He was buried at Trenton, N. J.

The paternal mansion of Governor Nathaniel Alexander is near to Poplar Tent—now Morehead place. He was also taught in the humble log-cabin school, and thence went to Princeton where he graduated in 1775. Governor Alexander was a brilliant and promising statesman, but died soon after his accession to the executive chair of the State in 1808. His mother who was a member of this church, had his remains brought from Raleigh and buried at Charlotte, beside his young and beautiful wife who had gone to the spirit-land before him. Mark Alexander, who illustrated a distinguished career as an honored and trusted statesman of Virginia, was born here, and in part educated at Poplar Tent. Samuel Harris, a native of Poplar Tent and early preceptor of the academy, graduated at Princeton in 1787, was elected and served as tutor in that institution, resigned in 1789. He then devoted himself to the ministry, engaged in the study of theology, and having nearly completed his course of study, died at Princeton in 1791, and lies buried in the college cemetery. Charles Wilson Harris was born in two miles of Poplar Tent in 1771—received the rudiments of his education here, was graduated at Princeton in 1792. He was the first president of

the University of North Carolina, and laid the foundation of its future greatness and renown. He died in 1803, and lies buried at Sneedsboro, Anson county. Though a man of unsurpassed learning and genius, his career was brief as it was brilliant in splendid attractions. Thomas Reese, D. D., a graduate of Princeton College and a distinguished minister of the Presbyterian church of South Carolina, was born and brought up in Poplar Tent. He died in South Carolina in 1796. Caleb Phifer was a member of this church, a life-long and useful member of the legislative councils of the State. General Robert Smith, a gallant officer and soldier in the revolution, was native to, and resident in, Poplar Tent. Major Robert W. Smith was a native here, and died in 1836. He was a man of education and polished manners—in the early part of his life he was the honored and trusted Senator in the councils of the State. Archibald Houston, a statesman known throughout the State for his cautious wisdom and incorruptible integrity, was a member of this church. He was the youngest brother of William Churchill Houston, of New Jersey, in 1843. Israel Pickens was born and brought up within three miles of Poplar Tent, and was the first Governor elected by the people of Alabama. After he served out his term as Governor he was chosen a Senator of the United States. He illustrated a brief but brilliant career in the U. S. Senate, and while yet in the zenith of his usefulness, and in the full exercise of his commanding talents, he ended his way in the island of Cuba, whither he had gone to recover this health. The Legislature of Alabama, in testimony of his eminent services, ordered his remains to be removed from Cuba and buried in the bosom of his adopted country. John Semaner, who lived on the farm now occupied by Capt. S. A. Grier, was a member of this church. He was an able and faithful public officer and a citizen of such spotless purity of character, that in the traditions of the country his name became the synonym of all that is just, and pure, and right. The family in name and branch has long since passed away. The Rev. Humphrey Hunter, though an Irishman by birth, from an early age was brought up and educated in Poplar Tent by Mr. Archibald. He received his certificate of dismission from this church. It is a matter of regret that the material is not at hand wherewith to do full justice to the memory of this eminent and devoted man. Suffice it to say, that after having illustrated an unsurpassed devotion and heroic achievement

as a gallant and true soldier in the war of the Revolution, he became no less eminent as a soldier and ambassador of the Cross. He was the revered pastor of Steel Creek Church, and died at an advanced age, in August, 1827. Rev. John Carrigan, a minister of the Presbyterian church, was brought up in Poplar Tent. He died in Rowan county in 1821. All these great lights that have emanated from Poplar Tent, and been conspicuous in Church and State, have passed away. Is there any of her sons to whom the touching inquiry does not occur—"Our Fathers, where are they? And the Prophets—do they live forever?"

It is creditable to Poplar Tent, that under all the circumstances, whether prosperous or adverse, her people have made great efforts to sustain and keep a classical school in their midst, and hence a large portion of the time, since the first settlement of the country, has been occupied in dispensing useful and enlightened instruction through her unpretending academy. The Rev. Robert Archibald, who taught school here many years, was a graduate of Nassau Hall. His successor, Samuel Harris, was a graduate of the same institution. Charles Caldwell, M. D., afterwards a distinguished savant of Kentucky, was a preceptor in this humble log-cabin academy.

Thomas Allison, an accomplished mathematician and most excellent man, taught the same school many years. He was a bachelor and lived to be quite old, but such is the fragrance of his name for purity of life, correctness of manners and efficient scholarship, that the title of reverence and respect was universally accorded to him by the address of Master Allison. Next Dr. Robinson presided within its time-honored walls.

Daniel Coleman, afterwards Assistant Postmaster General and Solicitor General for the State, was a teacher here. Next Jefferson Conly was a teacher for a considerable time, and his successor was the Rev. Addi E. Thom. Wm. H. Stanley, who was killed in the battle of Newbern in the late war of the States, also taught here. Wm. G. Wellington, who volunteered as a soldier and died in the army of Northern Virginia, also was a teacher here. Wm. H. Owen, formerly a tutor at Chapel Hill and President of Wake Forest College, had charge of the academy. Stephen Frontis was his successor and taught successfully for some time. The next teacher in the order of time was B. W. Mebane,—and now this time-honored institution is under the care and tutelage of James H. Morrison.

Dr. Charles Harris, a prominent physician and surgeon, organized a medical school in the same community, and educated about ninety young men for the medical profession, many of whom became distinguished in science and in the achievements of the healing art. He closed his long and useful career in 1825. Having lived usefully, he died resignedly, with supreme confidence and faith in the "all-healing medicine of the Great Physician."

Though the history of Poplar Tent is so imperfectly out-lined, it is manifest that with a step steady as the march of time she has borne her part faithfully and well in ushering in a high and pure civilization, in a new and great country; and thus proves that the sublime genius of Christianity is adapted to the elevation of men of every race, wheresoever its instructive lessons are conveyed to the human mind under Presbyterian auspices. Seven generations have passed away since her roll of history began, and the old church still stands strong and sure in her foundations of truth and virtue. Amid the ever-changing scenes of life and death, of poverty and prosperity, of war and peace, this people have reason to feel and to acknowledge with profound gratitude that if they have not followed a visible cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, that now in faith and hope they are reposing in the bosom of the blood-bought church, which they deem to be confederate of all in every land, who love its Head in heaven—that their fathers were led by a way they knew not, and by paths they had not known.

May the present generation, following the great examples and pleasant memories of the past, nightly pitch their moving tent a day's journey nearer home—ever beside the still waters, and amid the green pastures of His love.

Whatever may be the future, the past history of Poplar Tent teaches that she has contributed her full share of physicians to ameliorate the sufferings incident to humanity, and savants and divines to enlighten and elevate the world in science and religion, while her civilians and statesmen of proudest names and stations have adorned all the high places of power.

## A Brief Resume of Poplar Tent Church, From 1873 to 1923

---

This brief resume of Poplar Tent's history will contain little of the deeds of daring calculated to arouse the imagination, enkindle the enthusiasm, and evoke the praise of the reader as does the portrayal of the bravery of our fathers of the Revolutionary days, when on the field of battle and in the council chamber our liberty was purchased, when, with Spartan courage and quiet devotion, our mothers stayed "By the stuff," to use the words of King David, and kept the home fires burning, with a loyalty to country and a faith in God that insured a glorious victory. But nevertheless the story of the period that we are now concerned with, is a story of sacrifices and achievement, of battle and victory, of sorrow and of joy, of hope and of faith—a story written, not "on the sands of time," but on the indelible tablet of eternity.

Poplar Tent, in common with most country churches, has had her alternating seasons of depression and prosperity. Scarcely had the stormy days of the reconstruction period been successfully weathered, when many of her best people began moving to the city, which for a time, retarded her progress. But finally the depleted ranks of her membership were again filled by newcomers to farms that had been carved out of the larger plantations of former days. The exodus to the city seems now to be about over, and the membership of the church more permanent than it has been in many years. The congregation has been greatly blessed in the past in the quality of its leadership. Its pastors, on the whole, have been men of wisdom, learning and piety. Men who "kept the noiseless tenor of their way" while exerting an influence which lives today, and with the sweet assurance of a generous fruitage beyond eternity's shore. "The world will little note nor long remember" what they said and did here. Neither will proper acknowledgment be made of their ability, because of

the absence of ostentation in their daily walk and conversation. They sacrificed, they labored, they endured, often-times in the face of difficulties that would have defeated lesser souls. They reared their own monuments by the words spoken and the impressions made, which can never die. Some of them have "Fallen on sleep." Though dead, they yet speak, through the thoughts, words and deeds of others. Thus when the obelisk of fame shall be unveiled upon eternity's fair shore—there upon its pinnacle shall be carved in letters of burning light, many of the names of these erst-while forgotten prophets.

The list of pastors for this period is as follows:

\*The Rev. Daniel Allen Penick, D. D., who was pastor at the beginning of this period, resigned October 1873, died at Lexington, Va., August 22, 922.

\*Rev. James Henley Thornwell, D. D. Installed September, 1874. Resigned April, 1878.

Rev. James N. H. Summerell, D. D. Installed May 29, 1881. Resigned October 1, 1883.

\*Rev. James L. Williamson. Installed May 1885. Resigned February 1888.

\*Rev. Henry G. Gilland. Installed February 1889. Resigned April 9, 1892.

\*Rev. Henry D. Lequex. Installed November 1893. Resigned October 1894.

Rev. George L. Cook. Installed November 28, 1897. Resigned April 1900.

Rev. J. M. McLain. Installed September 30, 1900. Resigned May 6, 1906.

Rev. Chas. B. Ratchford. Installed August 18, 1907. Resigned March 28, 1909.

\*Rev. James E. Summers. Installed April 1910. Died at the manse March 9, 1914.

Rev. R. W. Culbertson. Installed January 31, 1915. Resigned March 24, 1920.

Rev. W. Hampton Eubank. The present pastor was installed April 23, 1922.

\* Those marked (\*) are dead.

Concerning those who have joined the Church triumphant, we would like to speak more fully, at least giving the time and place of their departure. But as we have not this information at hand, except in the instances above noted, we are unable to do so.

The elders who served the congregation during this

period and whose remains now peacefully sleep in God's Acre, back of the Church, are as follows:

William Shakespeare Harris, Theophilis Cannon, Daniel Stanhope Caldwell, Thomas H. Robinson, Dixon B. Penick, Nathaniel Johnston, Jr., Isaac Newton Pharr, Clinton Cyrus Caldwell, Starr Sandifer Johnston, and perhaps others of whom we could find no record.

These all finished their course in faith, and according to the best of our knowledge, we believe they are now representing the church in "the general assembly and church of the firstborn" which is mentioned in Hebrews 12:23.

The following elders and deacons removed from our bounds during this period:

Elders—Milas Johnston, Dr. James Lafferty, Zebulon A. Morris.

Deacons—J. M. Cannon, J. Mack Caldwell. Also Messrs. Caleb A. Barringer and John H. Morrison served as deacons for some time, but were released at their request.

The deacons who served during this period but have since fallen asleep are as follows:

Joseph H. Young, Thomas Edward Stirewalt, William W. Robinson, Robert Smith, P. R. Townsend.

Mr. Townsend became an elder in the Patterson Church, but is buried at Poplar Tent graveyard. Also a number of those in the list of elders served first as deacons, which accounts for the list of deacons being smaller than would normally be the case.

These deserve honorable mention. For they who worthily fill this important office "purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith." I Timothy 3:13. The service of the deacon is oftentimes a thankless one. Seldom does he get the support and encouragement of the church that he deserves. It therefore takes a man of real faith and perseverance to fill this sacred office.

Perchance some of those with whom we are here concerned, failed to get the human recognition that they deserved. But if they were faithful, what difference does it now make, since they are enjoying, with Stephen and the six others, who were full of the Holy Ghost, that blessed fellowship in the heavenly diaconate?

These, in common with all others whose mortal remains peacefully sleep in old Poplar Tent's graveyard while awaiting their complete redemption—"To-wit, the redemption of the body," as said the apostle Paul (Rom. 8:23) are

not forgotten. Though posterity "O'er their tomb no trophies raise," yet will nature daily sing her dirge and requiem in every gentle zephyr that softly stirs the over-hanging branches of the majestic oaks which, as lone sentinels, stand in silent guard round about this "City of the dead."

No one acquainted with the biography of man, his age long struggle for the mastery, his hopes, his fears, his defeats, his victories, his oftentimes buried and neglected potentialities; likewise his feeble nature and little talent often over-estimated and greatly exaggerated by the whims of the passing moment, can pass a lonely country graveyard without experiencing the feeling of Gray, so beautifully expressed in his "Elegy in a Country Church Yard:"

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid  
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;  
Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed  
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre.

But it is said that genius will be discovered and properly valued though it hide itself in the jungles. Such is not true. Observation shows that more often talent and genius, when cast in modest molds, seldom receive from the world a value commensurate with worth. While on the other hand, the over confident, small genius, often soars high on the wings of popular applause. Many of the world's greatest souls lived in obscurity and died in penury. No city would claim Homer, when he was living, but many have contended for him dead. Which is perhaps better than not to honor him at all, as is oftentimes the case.

Let us therefore cast the mantle of charity over the tombs of our forefathers, remembering that perhaps many of them were souls that needed only to be awakened, that their eloquence might have enraptured "Listening Senates to command."

Poplar Tent Church today has a membership of about 225. A strong Christian Endeavor Society, which is functioning regularly. And doubtless the oldest Women's Missionary Society in the South, as it was organized in 1817. The church is open every Sabbath for divine worship which is well attended. Also a mid-week prayer meeting which is fairly well attended.

The bench of elders is as follows:

George Jacob Untz, Robert Victor Caldwell, Charles T. Allison, William F. Cannon, Charles P. Caldwell, F. F. Allison, Geo. H. Cline.

The board of deacons is composed of the following:

Charles A. Cannon, Charles A. Fisher, W. G. Allison, Charles R. Andrew, Clyde Johnston, Arthur K. Morrison.

In conclusion: May Poplar Tent's present and future generations, study more diligently her noble past, and by it be inspired to more lofty ideals, to greater service, and to a deeper devotion to the great, eternal principles of righteousness and justice for which their ancestors stood, for a greater love for country, for humanity and for God, and for a missionary programme that will be satisfied with nothing short of the evangelization of the whole human race. And as a motto, a banner "With that strange device," —Excelsior.

W. HAMPTON EUBANK.

The Manse, October 31, 1923.





GRAVE OF HEZEKIAH JAMES BALCH

POPLAR TENT CHURCH AND CEMETERY AND  
TOMB OF REV. HEZEKIAH JAMES BALCH

Author of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence.

May 20, 1775.

---

By REV. W. HAMPTON EUBANK

---

No one, unless his soul be dead to the nobler things of life, can walk among the tombs of the heroes of the American Revolution without feeling a thrill of emotion, a feeling that he is treading upon holy ground, ground made sacred by the dust of those whose mighty deeds and great sacrifices in the cause of civil and religious liberty entitle them to everlasting remembrance, and their names to be revered as long as the spirit of liberty shall live in the hearts of men.

It is with such a feeling that one visits the historic old church and cemetery of Poplar Tent—a spot rich in history that should be dear to every true lover of liberty, but especially to every North Carolinian whose ancestors lived on North Carolina soil during the trying days of the Revolutionary War.

Poplar Tent, near the city of Concord, is one of the oldest churches in the state. It was organized in the year 1764. Its first regular pastor was Rev. Hezekiah James Balch, who was licensed by the Presbytery of Donegal in the year 1766, and ordained by the same Presbytery in 1769. In the year of his ordination he was installed as pastor of Poplar Tent and Rocky River Churches and continued in the same pastorate until his death in the early part of 1776. He was buried in the center of Poplar Tent cemetery after the inclosure had been carefully measured in order that the center might be accurately located. But his grave is not now in the center, as the cemetery has been enlarged.

Mr. Balch was a man of considerable ability and force of character, as subsequent events demonstrated. He

was a leading spirit in the Mecklenburg Convention, which met at Charlotte, May 20, 1775, and was appointed, together with two others—Ephraim Brevard and Wm. Kennon, Esq.: a sub-committee, to draw up a paper expressing the sentiments and will of the convention in its stand against British oppression. The paper they handed in shows their zeal, faith and ability, for it was none other than that immortal document, "The Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence."

Not only did Hezekiah James Balch serve on the committee that prepared the Mecklenburg Declaration, but according to Rev. Drs. J. B. Mack and Albert Franklin White, he was the real author of that declaration. Ephraim Brevard, whom history has credited with the authorship, was clerk of the committee and merely copied the draft written by Mr. Balch. The proof of this statement has been published by the two ministers above named. They are quoted by Morrison Caldwell, Esq., in "A Foreword," written by him and published in a reprint of "A Historical Sketch of Rocky River Church, From 1775 to 1875," by Rev. James B. Mack, D. D. The Mecklenburg declaration was not only drafted by Poplar Tent's pastor, but was signed by five of her members, part of whom were elders. They were Benjamin Patton, Zaccheus Wilson, John Phifer, David Reese, and Robert Harris.

Mr. Balch left no descendant to be called by his name, and for many years his grave was without a creditable monument. "But in the year 1847, a number of citizens met at Poplar Tent on the occasion of a railroad meeting, consisting of the late Judge Osborne, Dr. Charles W. Harris, now no more, and several others yet living, when attention was drawn to the fact that there was no monument to mark the grave of Mr. Balch; whereupon the fund was immediately raised to build a suitable monument." The work was done soon after this meeting. The grave was located for the monument by Mr. Abijah Alexander, who was then more than ninety years of age. Mr. Alexander was therefore about twenty years old when Mr. Balch was buried and therefore recollects very distinctly the time and place of his burial. In addition to the history here quoted, we have the following information from the pen of Mr. C. T. Allison, now an elder at Poplar Tent. Mr. Allison says: "In a conversation I had with the late Julius Melchor, of Mooresville, N. C., a few years before his death, he said, 'I was about twenty years old when Mr. Alexander

pointed out Mr. Balch's grave for the location of the monument, and was with him at the time and heard him say that he was personally acquainted with Mr. Balch and was at his (Balch's) burial. Mr. Melchor was born July 27, 1827, and died in 1917."

Unfortunately there has arisen some confusion in the minds of a number of people in other States as to the place of Mr. Balch's burial. In fact there are traditions connected with at least two other church cemeteries, each in a different state, and each claiming to have the tomb of the Balch of Mecklenburg fame.

However, it is easily seen how this confusion arose when we take into consideration the following facts: In, what was then the Synod of the Carolinas, there were three ministers of the name of Balch, one of which had both the given names of the other two. They were: Hezekiah Balch, James Balch, and Hezekiah James Balch. Hezekiah and James were theological opponents at the meetings of Synod. Hezekiah Balch was received as a licentiate from the Presbytery of New Castle, on March 7, 1771, into Hanover Presbytery, which, at that time, extended over the whole country south of the Potomac. He was received and ordained at the same meeting of Presbytery which was held at Buffalo Church.

When Orange Presbytery was set off from Hanover all three of the Balches became members of Orange Presbytery. And as late as 1788, both Hezekiah and James Balch were members of Orange Presbytery, which was twelve years after the death of Hezekiah James Balch at Poplar Tent. It is absolutely certain therefore that it was neither of the other Balches which was buried at Poplar Tent in 1776, as they were both living, as above stated, in 1788, and many years after.

Later we find (after 1788) both Hezekiah and James Balch, in the Presbytery of Abingdon, which was mainly in Tennessee. Later Abingdon Presbytery was divided into the Presbyteries of Abingdon and Union, James Balch remaining in Abingdon and Hezekiah going to Union. From these Presbyteries one, and perhaps both, of them journey westward. And it is their tombs, each of which has been mistaken for that of Hezekiah James Balch, their names being so nearly alike. Also they were both active, as almost every Presbyterian minister was at that time, in the cause of independence.

These facts are further sustained by Mr. C. T. Allison,

of Poplar Tent, in an article published in *The Concord Tribune*, which contained correspondence with authorities in Indiana, where one of the Balches is buried.

Aside from these facts there is no evidence whatever of either Hezekiah or James Balch having labored in Mecklenburg County, at that, or any other time. But the Balch of the Mecklenburg Convention was laboring in Mecklenburg County. Mecklenburg, at that time, included the present County of Cabarrus. Poplar Tent Church, which is about twenty miles from Charlotte and in Cabarrus County, was therefore in Mecklenburg County, at the time of the convention.

In support of what is here written the reader is referred to the following authorities: "Sketches of North Carolina," by Rev. Wm. H. Foote. See especially pages 281, 297 and 440. This work was published in 1846. "The Life and Character of the Rev. David Caldwell, D. D." Pages 96 and 191. This biography was published in 1812. Also the "Historical Sketch of Poplar Tent," by Wm. S. Harris, pages 5 and 6, published 1873.

Poplar Tent Church, though the word "Ichabod" might be written over her door, for her glory is largely in the past, is still alive and doing a good work. Her resident membership is 180, and is well represented on every Sabbath. Her "Woman's Missionary Society," which was organized in 1817, is still "carrying on." This society is doubtless the oldest of its kind in the state and perhaps in the South.

Space forbids mentioning the roll of pastors of this church, many of whom were among the most distinguished men in the Southern States for their piety, education and general usefulness. Chief among these was Rev. John Robinson, D. D., who was called to Poplar Tent from the Presbyterian Church of Fayetteville, N. C., in the year 1801. Dr. Robinson was a prince of preachers and an educator of tremendous influence. During his pastorate of thirty-six years at Poplar Tent he taught a classical school near the church, which became famous in his day. And according to Harris' History of Poplar Tent Church, it is to be doubted whether any college in the state since that day has turned out as many distinguished men as did Dr. Robinson's school.

Not only lack of space but time would fail me to tell of the work done here during the pastorates of such men as Drs. Pharr, of North Carolina; Thornwell, of South

Carolina; Penick, of Virginia by adoption, and Summerrell of North Carolina, whose bow still abides in strength. And of many others who wrought faithfully in time for a harvest in eternity. I leave them to be honored by a grateful posterity and with the hope that a pen more gifted yet than has hitherto been wielded will some day place their names where they so richly deserve to be. May I say with the extravagance of a poet's license,

"Far up the heights of deathless fame?"

Poplar Tent Manse.  
Route 1, Concord, N. C.

The above article, which was published in "The Presbyterian of the South," April 25, 1923, and later published in a number of other papers, attracted considerable attention. Among those who were interested were the connections of the Balch family, some of whom now live in Indiana. As a result, a correspondence began between a descendant of Mr. Balch, who is buried in the above mentioned state, and the author of the article. This correspondence corroborates rather than weakens the contention of this article.

W. HAMPTON EUBANK.

---

The inscription on the tomb of Mr. Balch is as follows:  
Beneath this Marble repose the mortal remains of the

REV. HEZEKIAH JAMES BALCH

first pastor of Poplar Tent congregation and one of the original members of Orange Presbytery.

He was a licensed preacher of the everlasting Gospel by the Presbytery of Donegal in 1766, ordained to the full work of the holy ministry in 1769 and rested from his labors A. D. 1776, having been the pastor of the united congregation of Poplar Tent and Rocky River about seven years.

He was distinguished as one of the committee of three who prepared that immortal document the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, and his eloquence the more effectual from his acknowledged wisdom, purity of motive and dignity of character, contributed much to the unanimous adoption of that instrument on the 20th of May, 1775.

**CABARRUS BLACK BOYS CHAPTER****Concord, N. C.****Organized June 25, 1914****MEMBERS**

- Allison, Mrs. J. P. (Annie Craige).  
Allen, Mrs. Geo. G. (Anita Walton).  
Armfield, Mrs. Frank (Lucille Armfield).  
Black, Mrs. R. K. (Lila McDonald).  
Cook, Mrs. J. P. (Margaret Norfleet).  
\*Coltrane, Mrs. D. B. (Mariam Winslow).  
Coltrane, Miss Jenn Winslow.  
Caldwell, Mrs. M. H. H. (Rosa McCorkle).  
Caldwell, Mrs. D. G., (Camille McCorkle).  
Cannon, Mrs. Chas. A. (Ruth Coltrane).  
Cannon, Mrs. J. L. (Dora Burkhead).  
Correll, Miss Wilma.  
Cline, Mrs. A. C. (Myrtle Broome).  
\*\*Dusch, Mrs. Frank (Mary Branson Coltrane).  
Edwards, Mrs. Geo. R. (Nancy Lee Patterson).  
Ervin, Miss Margaret Virginia.  
\*Ervin, Mrs. S. J. (Sallie Erwin).  
Flowe, Mrs. W. W. (Mary Lore).  
Fisher, Mrs. L. A. (Fay Polk).  
Fetzer, Mrs. P. B. (Mary Maxwell).  
Fry, Mrs. R. T. (Mary Esther Goodrich).  
Goodman, Mrs. Stafford (Louise King).  
Harris, Miss Clara.  
Harris, Miss Sara Myrtle.  
Harris, Mrs. A. E. (Laura Efird).  
Hartsell, Mrs. Luther T. (Janie Ervin).  
Herring, Miss Nell C.  
Houston, Mrs. W. C. (Nina Adams).  
Jolitz, Mrs. H. A. (Margaret Polk).  
Jones, Mrs. Robt. E. (Elizabeth Coltrane).  
\*\*Kearns, Mrs. D. A. (Emma Coble).  
King, Mrs. R. M. (Miriam Dumville).  
Linker, Mrs. W. M. (Lalla King).

Lore, Miss Adelaide McK.  
Lore, Miss Eugenia.  
Lockwood, Mrs. O. L. (Mary Bingham).  
\*\*Lowe, Mrs. S. J. (Eunice McDowell).  
Morris, Mrs. W. W. (Mary V. Farror).  
Maness, Mrs. T. D. (Ada Parker).  
Means, Mrs. Geo. B. (Emma Cannon).  
McFadyen, Mrs. P. R. (Alice Sibert).  
Northrup, Mrs. Stanton (Elizabeth Harris).  
Odell, Mrs. J. M. (Addie Allison).  
Odell, Mrs. A. G. (Grace Patterson).  
Parks, Mrs. Charles E. (Adelaide Cunningham).  
Pemberton, Miss Mary Phifer.  
Pemberton, Miss Adele.  
\*\*Reynolds, Mrs. G. D. B. (Elizabeth Parker).  
Richmond, Mrs. Geo. H. (Evelyn Grier).  
Ridenhour, Mrs. R. E. Sr. (Frances Fisher).  
Reed, Mrs. J. F. (Mary Lewis Harris).  
Ritchie, Mrs. M. F. (Geneva Parks).  
Sherrill, Mrs. W. M. (Nina Carpenter).  
Smith, Mrs. T. T. (Nannie Archibald).  
\*Wadsworth, Mrs. J. C. (Willie E. Johnson).  
Wagoner, Mrs. Chas. B. (Janie Patterson).  
Weddington, Mrs. W. M. (Caroline Webster).  
Williams, Mrs. H. S. (Ethel Reavis).  
Young, Mrs. Robt. S. (Nannie Ervin).  
Young, Miss Lizzie Craige.  
Young, Miss Mary Erwin.

\*Deceased.

\*\*Transferred.





